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ZOROASTRIAN SURVIVALS IN IRANIAN FOLKLORE

By R. C. Zaehner

Visitors to the Vatican Museum in Rome will remember that the very first monuments, flanking the entrance to the first room in the vast gallery that leads ultimately to the Sistine Chapel, are neither saints nor angels but what appear to be devils: for at each side of the entrance door, guarding it with their baleful presence, stand two most un-Christian deities with the head of a lion and gaping jaws. In both hands they bear keys, a snake encircles their bodies, and the Signs of the Zodiac are impressed on their limbs. Coming face to face with these awesome figures Christians may well recall the words of St. Peter: "Be sober and watch; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5.8). The serpent too which envelops the body of the lion-headed deity is all too familiar, and one is tempted to identify it with that selfsame serpent which tempted our first mother, Eve, to eat of the forbidden fruit.

Yet, interesting though the Christian parallels may be, we have long known that this rather repulsive deity has nothing to do with the Christian devil, for he figured in a cult that was for long Christianity's most potent rival in the early Roman Empire. This rival religion which has left monuments throughout the length and breadth of the Roman Empire is known as Mithraism, and its roots were originally in Iran; for the god Mithra, from whom the New Persian word *mehr*, meaning both the "sun" and "affection" derives, was, in the Zoroastrianism of the later Achaemenian Empire, second only to the supreme Deity, Ahura Mazdāh himself.

Everything in the history of Zoroastrianism is obscure, and not least the relationship between the Mithraism so widely practised in the Roman Empire and the varieties of Zoroastrianism we must assume to have existed in Iran. With the central figure of Mithra-Mithras himself we are not for the present concerned. Though the rôle of Mithras in the Mithraic mysteries is quite different from that of the genuinely Iranian god Mithra of the later Avesta, at least we know that the Roman Mithras, whose slaying of a bull in sacrifice is recorded in innumerable monuments, must ultimately derive from the Iranian Mithra, the divine guardian of the compact, if for no other reason than that the name is the same.

The lion-headed deity, however, who, next to Mithras himself, is the most frequently met with among all the deities of the Mithraic pantheon, was until quite recently a much more puzzling figure. The great Belgian scholar, Franz Cumont, had identified this sinister figure with the Iranian god of time and fate, Zurvān, largely because the statues are often adorned with the Signs of the Zodiac; and such was this scholar's immense prestige that lesser men followed all too tamely in his footsteps. It was left to another Belgian, Professor Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin (*Ohrmazd et Ahriman*, p. 128) and myself (BSOAS, 1955, p. 237) to point out that this truly "diabolical" god can scarcely have been other than the Zoroastrian devil, Ahriman, however surprising that might seem to be. Among the various dedications to Mithraic deities that survive there are none to Zurvān or to any corresponding Roman God of time or fate, but quite a number *deo Arimanio*, "to the god Ahriman". Common sense should have told us long ago that the gaping lion-headed monster must in fact be Ahriman himself. As I then wrote:

It seems to me certain that the god represented is not Zurvān, as Cumont had supposed, but Ahriman. It would seem inconceivable that this deity which is of more frequent occurrence than any except the Mithras Tauroctonus himself should not be mentioned in any Mithraic dedication. *Prima Facie* then the lion-headed deity whose body is encircled by a snake would represent the *deus Arimanius* to whom votive tablets are dedicated. That there should be no dedications at all to a deity which obviously played an extremely important part in the cult seems incredible; and of the deities to which votive tablets are dedicated, none can conceivably be the leontocephalous monster except Arimanius-Ahriman.

Mithraism, however, though it is unquestionably of Iranian origin, differs so radically from any form of Zoroastrianism we know of in the Iranian sources that we have to look for possible affiliations elsewhere. What, indeed, distinguishes Mithraism from the main forms of Zoroastrianism we know from the Avesta, the Pahlavi books, and the later Zoroastrian sources written in New Persian is the cult it offers to Ahriman. To a Zoroastrian, to offer homage to such a being would be as unthinkable as it would be for a Moslem, whether Shī'ī or Sunnī, to prostrate himself to Iblls. Yet we know that there were persons, claiming to be Zoroastrians who did precisely this, for we read in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* (369D–370D):

Some [Iranians, he writes] recognize two gods,—as it were rival artificers,—the one the creator of good things, the other of bad: but others call the better [power] God, and the other a “daemon”, as does Zoroaster the Magus. . . . He called the one Horomazes (Ohrmazd) and the other Areimanios (Ahriman); and he showed too that of all sensible things the former resembled chiefly light, but the latter, on the other hand, resembled darkness and ignorance. Between the two is Mithras, wherefore the Persians also call Mithras the Mediator. And he taught them to sacrifice to the one votive offerings and thanks-offerings, but to the other offerings for averting evil, things of gloom.

Theologically this corresponds fairly closely to what we learn from the Pahlavi books, but the cult offered to Ahriman, even for the understandable purpose of averting evil, is absolutely anathema to any orthodox Zoroastrian. Of all sins the propitiation of Ahriman and his attendant demons was considered to be the worst. What Plutarch calls the teaching of Zoroaster was in fact abhorred by Zoroastrian orthodoxy: it is what the Zoroastrian texts call *dēvāsnih* or “devil-worship”. This is frequently mentioned and condemned in the Pahlavi books, but we learn very little from them about the actual beliefs and practices of these much-persecuted people. “Thus”, I wrote in 1955, “in seeking to interpret Mithraism against the background of these ‘devil-worshippers’, we run the risk of seeking to explain the unknown from the unknown. It is, however, legitimate”, I added, “to see in the Mandaeans and Yezīdīs of Iraq and in the *Ahl i Haqq* of Kurdistan remote survivors of precisely such a religion. It is true that the *Ahl i Haqq* texts appear in Shī'a, or more precisely 'Alī-Ilāhī guise, but the pagan substructure still shows clearly through.”

This hunch that light might one day be thrown both on what the Zoroastrians call “demon-worship” and on Mithraism which seemed to be a Western offshoot of it, has recently been confirmed in a quite extraordinary way, for I now have in my rooms in Oxford an enormous work which can only be described as a popular Epic and which, so far as I know, has never before been written down. It originates in Luristān.

Just how this remarkable work came into my hands is so peculiar and so full of coincidence that I must recount it in some detail. The story begins at the end of the last war when I was working in the British Embassy in Tehran and when, to my immense regret now, my thoughts were no longer directed towards Zoroastrianism, let alone to the folklore of Luristān, of which I in any case knew nothing and in which at that time I had no interest.

When the British and American armies left Iran a whole mass of servants and menial workers were temporarily thrown out of work, and their former employers naturally tried to find jobs for them with those of their compatriots who remained in Iran. One such person came my way, and although I did not really have any employment to offer, so remarkable was he that I took him on as an extra houseboy. In appearance there was nothing extraordinary about him. He came from a village called Raykhān in southern Luristān. Throughout the war he had taken on odd jobs with American or British units in Tehran, but he never seemed to stay long as he had often to return to Luristān to help his family out there with what money he had earned in the capital. What, however, distinguished him from the vast majority of his own kind—for, it must be remembered, he came from a very poor peasant family—was that not only was he wholly literate in Persian, but in the course of the war years he had become literate in English too. I do not mean that he had picked up a word or two in his day-to-day dealings with the Americans and British; no, he had painstakingly taught himself the language with practically no assistance from outside. And this was not all. When he came to my notice he was engaged in writing what appeared to be a very long novel in English, and he had already written some 100,000 words.

Now, one might have supposed that with these astonishing linguistic achievements to his credit, he might have sought a clerical job, but he never did. On the contrary, he had a strong aversion to clerical work of any kind, and an even stronger one for the kind of person normally employed on this type of work. Being very much of the earth, he deeply mistrusted the townsman, and this made him somewhat anti-social and incapable of co-operating with others who were on the surface so much more "polished" than himself. Of his personal appearance he took no care whatever, and this made it extremely difficult to fit him in. In fact he only stayed with me about six weeks and then simply vanished. I have never seen him again.

During this short time, however, he did occasionally consult me about his "novel". In English it was called "Irradiant" (the Persian, as I have subsequently learnt, was *nūr-afgan*) which was the hero's name. Another prominent character in the book had the evocative name of "Chandelier" (here again we happen to know that the original Persian was *chehel-cherāgh*). The basis of the story, I imagined (correctly), must derive from folklore, and the names certainly suggested an ultimately Zoroastrian origin—some version, that is, of a struggle between the powers of light and the powers of darkness. However, the author, 'Ali Mirdrakvandi, for such was his name, disappeared, taking the unfinished manuscript with him, and I thought no more about it.

Fortunately, a former employer and friend of Mirdrakvandi had been more farsighted than myself. This was Mr. J. F. B. Hemming, now resident in Cornwall, who had been in touch with him for much of the war. Mirdrakvandi was literally obsessed with the idea of learning English, and Mr. Hemming used to correct the letters he sent to him from time to time. These became longer and longer, so that Mr. Hemming finally asked him whether he didn't know a story he could write for him in English. He replied, Yes, he did know one story. This was *Irradiant*, and by the time Mr. Hemming left Iran less than half the story had been actually written. Arrangements, however, were made by which the story was to be sent on in instalments to England. In the end the book was completed and Mr. Hemming found himself with the colossal manuscript of nearly 400,000 words, not knowing what, if anything, could be done with it. With the paper shortage prevailing after the war plainly the publication of so immense a work was out of the question; so it had to be put away in cold storage. Meanwhile he continued to correspond with Mirdrakvandi, but no letter has been received from him since 1949. Whether he is still alive we do not know, and this is, of course, one of the things I should still like to ascertain.

Here the story might have ended, but in the autumn of 1963 Mr. Hemming again bethought himself of the mammoth manuscript in his charge, and started to make enquiries at the London School of Oriental and African Studies as to whether this material had any academic interest; and so in due course I received a letter from him. I was immediately interested, first because I too had known Ali Mirdrakvandi at first hand, and secondly because I thought that *Irradiant* might contain material which would help to illumine some of the knottier Zoroastrian problems. I confess that I was not over-optimistic; and the first instalment I received seemed to me no more than a very good and extraordinarily imaginative fairy-tale with very little religious significance. I had hoped for something along the lines of the *Ahl i Haqq* tales published by Ivanow, and I was disappointed that *Irradiant* or *Nūr-afgan* contained no obviously religious myth as the Kurdish tales did. *Nūr-afgan*, despite his name, was no incarnation of the Sun-god as are the heroes of the *Ahl i Haqq* tales, but simply the son of very poor and very aged parents in the best fairy-tale tradition.

When I reached Book II, however, I began to rub my eyes, for the first words I read were these:

The Lionish-God was sitting on his throne and his crown on his head. His orb was sitting in his left hand. All the Prophets of high rank were sitting behind him, every one in his own place.

Well, this certainly seemed interesting. In 1955 I and Professor Duchesne-Guillemin had suggested that the prototype of the lion-headed god in Mithraism was the Zoroastrian Ahriman, and here I had stumbled into a "Lionish-God sitting on his throne and his crown on his head". Surely, I thought, this must be Ahriman himself surviving in a folk-tale.

Before proceeding any further I must say a few words about the setting of the story. In Book I we have so far heard nothing about Lionish God: all we know is that there are two religions practised

in the country in which Irradiant was born: these are called respectively “ deists ” or “ true-believers ” on the one hand and “ heathens ” on the other. In Persian this would presumably be *yazdān-parastān* or *mo'menīn* on the one hand and *koffār* or *kāfirān* on the other. All this, of course, might very well be Moslem, and the “ heathens ” might represent any non-Moslem or pre-Moslem sect; for so far we have been told very little about the beliefs of either religion. We are, however, told that the “ heathens ” are also worshippers of Satan, and this puts us in mind of the Yezīdīs popularly called “ devil-worshippers ” by their enemies. Not very much is known about their beliefs except that they pay especial honour to a “ Peacock Angel ” or “ Peacock of the Angels ” whom their enemies identify with Satan and who is most beautiful.

In *Irradiant*, at the end of the first of the many wars of which this Epic tells, when the unbelievers have been conquered, most of the vanquished submit and agree to give up the worship of Satan and to turn to the worship of the true God who dwells in heaven. One very old man, however, refuses. “ ‘Why you don't believe in God who is in Heaven when all your fellows have done?’ asked the king. ‘My fellows are foolish but I'm not, I have seen the Satan with my eyes, he is more beautiful than Irradiant. He can be seen, but your God who is in Heaven can't be seen.’ ” This myth is certainly of Semitic origin—Satan being Lucifer, the “ bringer of light ” whose fall is occasioned by his refusal to serve God. In Mohammadan tradition Satan is sometimes spoken of as having been designated to rule the lowest heaven, and he was only deprived of this dignity when he refused to bow down to Adam.

Worship of a most beautiful Satan is thus easily explained from the Mohammadan tradition itself. Satan is a Semitic devil with nothing Iranian or Zoroastrian about him. In Book II, however, we come to know Lionish God, who, as we shall see, is almost certainly a survival of the Iranian devil, Ahriman; and it is somewhat surprising, then, that we are told that Satan and Lionish God are in fact brothers. This is, however, the way religious syncretism works: old ideas are dressed up in new forms and the most surprising identifications take place. Before we try to explain this surprising conjunction, however, we must return to the plot of the story.

Irradiant is born of very aged and very poor parents who are true-believers, and they live in a predominantly heathen country whose king is a heathen. They are persecuted and imprisoned, but Irradiant escapes and, after a long series of adventures, he overthrows and kills the king and makes his father king in his place. Before doing this, however, he overthrows the king of a neighbouring country who becomes a true-believer, destroys the king of a third heathen country and makes an “ inn-keeper ” who had befriended him and who is himself a true-believer, king, and saves what at this stage of the story is the only country of true-believers from an enchantment which had literally paralysed its queen and all her subjects. With these allies he overthrows the king who had persecuted his parents and makes his own father king in his place. At this point, one would have thought, the story would naturally come to an end. It is, however, only the prelude to a far more titanic struggle between Irradiant and his allies on the one hand and Lionish God of whose very existence we were ignorant throughout Book I on the other.

Book II, as we have seen, opens with Lionish God sitting on his throne with his crown upon his head. This is the first we have heard of Lionish God, and though, in the first book, we have met with all manner of supernatural creatures—demons, hags, satyrs and so on—none of these is ever referred to as a god. Lionish God, on the other hand, is repeatedly called “ god ”, and he refers to himself as the Creator. Moreover, he is surrounded by what appears to be an angelic court; for we read on:

Gabriel prostrated himself before Lionish God, and he said, “ Thou certainly knowest [that] who is standing outside thy high palace.” “ Yes, I know who he is, but I like you to tell me ”, replied Lionish God.

Now, there are two points worth noticing here. First, what is the Angel Gabriel doing in the company of Lionish God ? And secondly, why does Lionish God who is believed to be omniscient, still insist on being told who is outside the palace ? The answer to the second question is that he has to ask because he is not really omniscient, and only believes himself to be so. The significance of this will become clear later. The presence of Gabriel presents further problems, the answers to which is not plain.

Lionish God, as I hope to show, is really related to the lion-headed deity of Mithraism and is there-

fore the lineal descendant of the Zoroastrian Ahriman. Does this mean that the original authors of this Epic wished thereby to identify their own Ahriman with the God of the conquering Moslems? It is very hard to say since there are obviously level upon level of interpolation and addition within the main story, and one of these at least is Moslem, since the "true-believers" give the Koranic account of Satan's refusal to pay homage to Adam, and later in the book the "true" Gabriel turns up in the presence of Lionish God's rival, "Heavenly God".

To return to the second point, however. Lionish God claims to be omniscient, but in fact he knows very little, even of what is going on in his own kingdom. Similarly the Zoroastrian Ahriman is described as *a-dān*, "without knowledge", and as *dušākās*, "evilly conscious"; he deceives himself (*Dēnkart*, ed. Madan, 585.8) into believing that he is omnipotent and omniscient. So too in *Irradiant* the fall of Lionish God is largely due to the gradual realization among his subjects that he is in fact neither omniscient nor omnipotent. These resemblances may not amount to very much, but there are further resemblances which are very striking indeed.

In *Irradiant* there are two gods, the true one—Heavenly God—who is the creator of heaven and earth and dwells in heaven and is invisible, and the false one—Lionish God—whose realm is this earth, who believes himself to be omnipotent and omniscient, and who claims to be creator of the earth but not of heaven. In the Zoroastrian creation myth too we have two gods—Ohrmazd who dwells in the lights on high, and Ahriman who dwells in the darkness in the depths. The chief difference, of course, between the two accounts is that the Zoroastrian Ahriman dwells in eternal darkness while Lionish God is represented as being an earthly king. Yet I think that there is more to it than this; for it is quite clear that *Irradiant* reflects a form of Zoroastrianism that is by no means orthodox—a form that allowed very much more power to Ahriman than is allowed to him either in the Avesta or in the Pahlavi books. This appears to have been the case in Mithraism too, for on many of the statues of the Mithraic lion-headed deity the Signs of the Zodiac are embossed, and almost invariably this sinister deity holds a key in each hand. The symbolism of this appears to be that this god controls the fate of the world through the heavenly bodies and that he holds the keys of heaven too. He is, then, a malign power that keeps the soul imprisoned in the world and prevents it from rising up to heaven. Ahriman then, in the Mithraic system, is the prince of this world.

This idea is not unknown in other sources, for we read in the Moslem heresiographer Shahrstānī (Cureton, p. 183) that according to one sect of the Zoroastrians, the Zurvanites, Ahriman did in fact "master the world" and that for a time Ohrmazd had no power against him. Again according to the Armenian Christian polemist, Eznik of Kolb, Ahriman rules the world for nine thousand years, while Ohrmazd rules above him, presumably in heaven: the one is king in time, the other in eternity (Venice edition, p. 139). In the Pahlavi sources themselves a measure of earthly power is granted to Ahriman, though he never really has a chance of winning. According to the *Bundahishn*:

Ohrmazd knew in his omniscience that within these nine thousand years three thousand would pass entirely according the will of Ohrmazd, three thousand would pass according to the will of both Ohrmazd and Ahriman, and that in the last battle the Destructive Spirit would be made powerless and that he himself would save creation from aggression (p. 7).

This pattern is precisely what we find in *Irradiant*. Before passing on to that, however, we must describe the original state of existence as it is found in Zoroastrian mythology and see how oddly this same situation reappears in the form of a fairy-tale in *Irradiant*. In both the scene is dominated by two rival gods, the one good and the other evil. The situation in the Zoroastrian myth is described by the *Bundahishn* in this way:

Ohrmazd was on high in omniscience and goodness; for Infinite Time he was ever in the light. The light is the space and place of Ohrmazd: some call it the Endless Light. Omniscience and goodness are the totality of Ohrmazd. . . .

Ahriman, slow in knowledge, whose will is to smite, was deep down in the darkness: [he was] and is, yet will not be. The will to smite is his all, and darkness is his place: some call it the Endless Darkness.

Similarly in *Irradiant* Heavenly God is depicted as dwelling above in heaven, Lionish God, like the Mithraic rather than the Zoroastrian Ahriman, holds sway here below on earth. Further just as

Ahriman is "slow in knowledge", so is Lionish God extremely badly informed: he lays claim to omniscience, yet always has to ask what is going on. He knows little, and what little he knows, he knows too late. Again, like Ohrmazd, Heavenly God "was and is and evermore shall be", whereas Lionish God "was and is, yet shall not be", for he is slain by Irradiant at the end of the story with his own sword. Similarly in the popular version of the destruction of Ahriman we are told that they dragged him outside the sky and cut off his head (*Ābyātkār i Zāmāspik*, ed. Messina, 14.17) with his own sword (*Mortezā Rāzi*, ed. Eqbāl, Tehran, 1313, p. 13).

Ahriman, of course, being eternal in time past, believes himself also to be eternal in time future, and this view is shared by Lionish God in *Irradiant*; for his daughter who bears the astonishing name of Twinkling Starlet, says of him: "My father has been reigning for the past 100 years; he will reign forever, and he will never die." So far the resemblances are astonishingly close. Let us see how the Zoroastrian myth goes on:

Ohrmazd in his omniscience knew that Ahriman existed, that he would attack and, since his will is envy, would mingle with him; and from the beginning to the end [he knew] with what and how many instruments he would accomplish his purpose. In ideal form he fashioned forth such creation as was needful.

Ahriman, ever slow to know, was unaware of the existence of Ohrmazd. Then he rose up from the depths and went to the border from whence the lights are seen. When he saw the light of Ohrmazd intangible, he rushed forward. Because his will is to smite and his substance is envy, he made haste to destroy it. Seeing valour and supremacy superior to his own, he fled back to the darkness and fashioned many demons, a creation destructive and meet for battle.

Ahriman, then, once he comes to know of Ohrmazd's existence, sets out to destroy him, but before doing so he makes a preliminary reconnaissance at the borders of Ohrmazd's heavenly realm which, it should be noted, is intangible. This too is faithfully reflected in *Irradiant*. There it is not indeed explicitly stated that Lionish God does not know of the existence of Heavenly God since in the fairy-tale the episode does not take place at the beginning of time, but the Zoroastrian story of the two gods preparing their instruments for the battle does re-appear, for Lionish God, after his attack on heaven has failed, says: "Heavenly God had set himself against me from old days and also he had prepared all the instruments of war on me". This recalls the *Bundahishn* phrase: "In ideal form he fashioned forth such creation as was needful."

Let us return to the *Bundahishn* to see how the situation between the two gods develops there. Each has now created a spiritual armament with which to combat the other, but the difference between the two is that whereas Ahriman is bent on destroying Ohrmazd and his whole creation, Ohrmazd, in his goodness, desires only peace. And so:

Ohrmazd, knowing in what manner the end would be, offered peace to Ahriman, saying; "O Ahriman, bring aid to my creation and give it praise that in reward therefor thou mayest be deathless and unageing, uncorrupting and undecaying. And the reason is this that if thou dost not provoke a battle, thou shalt not thyself be powerless, and to both of us there shall be benefit abounding. But Ahriman cried out: "I will not bring aid to thy creation nor will I give it praise, but I shall destroy thee and thy creation for ever and ever: yea, I shall incline all thy creatures to hatred of thee and love of me." And the interpretation thereof is this, that he thought Ohrmazd was helpless against him, and that therefor did he offer peace. He accepted not but offered threats. And Ohrmazd said: "Thou canst not, O Ahriman, accomplish all, nor canst thou bring it about that my creation should not return to my possession."

All this reappears in closely parallel form in *Irradiant*. Lionish God attacks heaven on two occasions. The first attack seems to correspond to the preliminary reconnaissance of the kingdom of light by Ahriman to which we have already referred. God's spiritual creation, as we have seen, is intangible, and this too emerges from *Irradiant*. As Lionish God prepares his attack, a false friend urges him on in these words:

"Thou surely wilt destroy the Heavenly God and conquer Heaven if thou settest thy armies against him, for the Heavenly God has no armies. He hath only several bands of angels. The angels have no armour, nor can they fight. They can only worship their God and praise him."

This exactly corresponds to Ahriman's belief that "Ohrmazd was helpless against him, and that therefor did he offer peace". Lionish God's treacherous adviser, however, failed to point out that Heavenly God's creatures in heaven were spiritual beings, and therefore, as the *Bundahishn* too has it, "intangible". This is demonstrated in the most vivid way when the attack actually takes place:

They went to heaven with all speed. Ten hours passed. They reached a place where they could not see the earth any more, either by their telescope (*sic*) or by the magnifier. Twenty-five hours passed. They reached the air where they could see the sun no more, nor could they see the moon either, or the stars. The Lionish God was exceedingly angry. His commanders said to him: "Thy godly knowledge is much greater than is any of ours (*Text*: 'is much over all of us', *sc. az hameh mā bālātar ast*), but we think that the heaven has been taken away and the heavenly God has escaped himself." "I think so", replied the Lionish God and his anger increased from minute to minute,

Then Heavenly God said to heaven: "Go down where my creatures may reach thee and see thee." So the Heaven came down by the power of Heavenly God.

"O that is heaven", cried all the troops.

A furious attack on heaven is now unleashed. Arrows pour into heaven from all directions, but there seems to be no one there. So:

The Commanders said to the Lionish God: "We think that the heavenly God has eloped(!) and the heaven has been evacuated, for we have not seen any angel living or being killed, although we have entered the heaven by about five miles." . . . All the angels began to laugh.

And they besought Heavenly God that they might be permitted to hurl the aggressor out, but Heavenly God replied: "Nay, nay, No, I don't allow you to destroy them; let them be happy, let them carry on their business and let them bully(!) me, for they don't understand." This surely is the Zoroastrian Ohrmazd speaking, the God of whom the *Mēnōk ī Khrat* (28) says: "Ohrmazd, the Lord, is the most patient; for for nine thousand years he sees Ahriman [inflict] misery on his creatures, yet he does not smite him except with justice and patiently."

Like Ahriman's preliminary reconnaissance Lionish God's first attack on heaven comes to nothing, but for different reasons. Ahriman returns to the darkness because he realizes he is not yet strong enough to attack, Lionish God returns because there is no solid food to eat in heaven and because the provisions he had brought with him turn into camphor! In neither case is anything effective done.

It is at this stage of the Zoroastrian myth that Ohrmazd offers peace to Ahriman, and the same happens in *Irradiant*. Lionish God returns from heaven with a captive lion who is really Heavenly God's messenger. This messenger is imprisoned, but Lionish God allows his daughter, Twinkling Starlet, to visit him, and he tells her about Heavenly God, his power, and his peaceful ways. So she duly reports back to her father and says:

Heavenly God is stronger than the other creators and has authority all over the world. . . . But Heavenly God is a peaceful creator, and he likes the other creators, albeit he is able to destroy all other creators ere long. He says that Heavenly God never wishes to persecute any creature, nor any creator at all without any cause. My father and my creator, my original desire is that thou wouldst make this poor lion free, and forgettest about the heavenly God and heaven. My father, make a peace between thee and Heavenly God, and let this poor lion go, I pray thee, I am sure Heavenly God will send many gifts for thee, if thou wilt make a peace, for heavenly God is surely wilful of the peace.

Here again the correspondence with the Zoroastrian sources is extraordinary. Heavenly God offers peace as in the *Bundahishn*, and in addition he offers gifts—the gifts being, according to the *Bundahishn*, immortality and "benefit abounding". The offer of peace is, however, rejected, and Ahriman threatens either to destroy Ohrmazd and his creation or to cause his creation to love him and to hate Ohrmazd. So too in *Irradiant* Lionish God issues dire threats against Heavenly God (I keep the strange English of the original to give you some idea of the curious flavour of the book). This is what he writes:

Verily I say unto you, my greatest and highest wrath has been spread into the air, it is floating on air, on earth, and upon where no one knows but myself. It shall not cease, unless you be murdered and your heaven be conquered. I shall excuse you no more, neither shall you reign up in heaven any more, nor shall another creator live any more, but I, who am called "Excellence Lionish God".

Again just as Ahriman claims that he will cause Ohrmazd's creatures to hate their creator, so is it said of Lionish God that he "has caused the creatures on earth to forget their original Creator who is Heavenly God"; he "has set the creatures on earth against their principal Creator who is Heavenly God". The exactitude of these parallellisms is really quite astonishing.

The next episode in the *Bundahishn* is the compact which Ohrmazd and Ahriman make together according to which the conflict will be limited to nine thousand years. In the words of the *Bundahishn*:

Ohrmazd said to Ahriman: "Fix a time so that by this pact we may extend the battle for nine thousand years." For he knew that by fixing a time in this wise Ahriman would be made powerless. Then Ahriman, not seeing the end, agreed to that treaty, just as two men who fight a duel fix a term [saying], "Let us on such a day do battle till night falls."

Or in the words of the *Mēnōk i Khrat*:

For nine thousand years [Ahriman] made a treaty with Ohrmazd through infinite Time and till it is completed no one can change it or make it different. And when nine thousand years have fully elapsed, Ahriman will be made powerless.

This "treaty" is paralleled in *Irradiant* too though the details do not agree. After the first attack on heaven Lionish God writes a letter to Heavenly God in which he threatens to destroy him. And his letter is followed by an *agreement* signed by the "Creator of Earth, Excellence Lionish God". It has ten articles none of which, however, exactly correspond to the much simpler Zoroastrian account. The agreement starts in this way:

AGREEMENT. 1—I shall agree: The war between me and Heavenly God shall continue until Heavenly God be destroyed and the originator of all becomes one, who I am. 2—There shall never be peace between me and Heavenly God.

He further promises to destroy Heavenly God and to burn up all who continue to worship him. With Heavenly God thus disposed of, "My brother devil shall be the judge on the judgment day. 10—Heavenly God shall never be taken out from Hell, after he has been cast down into it."

Admittedly the terms of the treaty are not the same in the two accounts, but the fact that the treaty reappears at all amounts to additional proof that this strange Epic which has survived purely by chance is really based on the Zoroastrian myth of the conflict between Ohrmazd and Ahriman, which probably dates back at least to the fourth century B.C. Every phase of the myth duly reappears in the story from Luristān.

Before passing on to the next episode it is worth pointing out that Lionish God, though he claims to be a creator, never claims to have created anything but the *earth* and all that it contains: he is creator of what is now called the *dunyā*; he is not nor does he claim to be the creator of the *ālam* or universe. This may well have been the belief of the so-called "demon-worshippers" and of the Roman Mithraists as we shall see in our next article.

In the *Bundahishn* Ohrmazd and Ahriman have now agreed to limit the battle to nine thousand years. Ahriman now attacks again, and is again repulsed:

Then Ohrmazd chanted the *Ahunvar* . . . : and he showed to Ahriman his own final victory, the powerlessness of Ahriman, the destruction of the demons, the resurrection, the Final Body, and the freedom of all creation from all aggression for ever and ever. When Ahriman beheld his own powerlessness and the destruction of the demons, he was laid low, swooned, and fell back into the darkness. . . . Unable to do harm to the creatures of Ohrmazd for three thousand years Ahriman lay crushed.

This second defeat of Ahriman, surely enough, reappears in *Irradiant*. Lionish God collects a massive army which he transports to heaven on demons. He reaches what the text calls the "resemblance of heaven" at midnight; but suddenly "a voice came from heaven saying, 'O, Lionish God, fear Heavenly God and take your troops back on earth, otherwise, you will get trouble.'" Lionish God disregards the voice and sends some of his troops towards the sun. "Suddenly the same voice came from heaven to Lionish God saying, 'O, Lionish God, you will be faced with danger, if you don't take your armies back on earth.'" Again Lionish God pays no attention and bids his com-

manders attack. His words to them are worth quoting if only to give you some idea of the peculiar but charming English in which this amazing Epic happens to have survived:

“ I said [says Lionish God] don't listen to that bad voice; attack from that direction, get on the ball.”

[Then] the voice came from heaven thrice [so] loud and strong. . . . The voice said to Lionish God wrathfully, “ This is my last voice. Take your armies back on earth ; fear your God who has given you authority on earth.”

Lionish God, however, is undeterred, and he and his troops rain arrows into heaven. Then,

After they had shot for fifteen minutes, suddenly a little black piece of cloud came over the armies and it begun to thunder quickly. After the cloud had thundered for one minute, suddenly one thunderbolt came out among the thunders and it was explosion. The voice of the explosion of the thunderbolt was so offensive and so strong and so light that the distance between heaven and earth had been lighted like day time. All the armies had been fainted, some had been died and some had been deaf. . . . All the armies began to fall [off] coming down from heaven to earth. . . . But the part of Lionish God's troops who had gone to the direction of sun, they were yet continuing their attacks on heaven from the direction of sun. Suddenly a very little star came out from the sun and it was burst, after it had entered among [that] part of [the] troops. A kind of fire came out from the small star. That kind of star was so vigorous that all [that] part of the troops had been burnt up during five minutes. . . . Lionish God's armies reached a hundred miles far from earth during their fainting.

Here the resemblance between the two accounts is quite astonishing. In the *Bundahishn* Ohrmazd causes Ahriman to lose consciousness by chanting the *Ahuna Vairya* prayer. Similarly in *Irradiant* Heavenly God warns Lionish God three times and his voice is followed by thunder and lightning which cause Lionish God to lose consciousness and fall down to earth. The “ fainting ” and the “ falling ” could almost be a literal translation of the Pahlavi words *sturt ut abōd* used in the *Bundahishn*, so exactly do the two accounts correspond. Moreover, the *Ahuna Vairya* prayer itself is in three parts, each comprising seven words, and, according to the *Bundahishn*, this is the effect it has:

When one third thereof is recited, Ahriman shudders for fear; when two thirds are recited, he falls on his knees; when the prayer is finished he is powerless.

Thus the three voices mentioned in *Irradiant* again reflect an ancient Zoroastrian tradition.

In the *Bundahishn* account Ahriman remains unconscious for three thousand years. During this period Ohrmazd creates the material world as a bulwark against Ahriman when he again attacks. When this third attack at last comes it is devastatingly effective, and Ahriman succeeds in defiling everything Ohrmazd has created, first the sky, then the waters, then the plants, the prototypes of the animal kingdom and of man, and finally fire. He has achieved what appears to be a complete victory, and he exultantly exclaims:

Perfect is my victory: for I have rent the sky, I have befouled it with murk and darkness, I have made it my stronghold. I have befouled the waters, pierced open the earth and defiled it with darkness. I have dried up the plants, and brought death to the Bull, sickness to Gayōmart. . . . I have seized the kingdom. On the side of Ohrmazd none remains to do battle except only man; and man, isolated and alone, what can he do ? (*Zātspram*, 2.18).

In his first war against the material creation, then, Ahriman wins a crushing victory. How do matters stand in *Irradiant* ? After his second defeat which sent him swooning back to earth, Lionish God is utterly dejected, not knowing what to do. One night he dreams, and in his dream “ suddenly he saw a very beautiful young-man come to him. Lionish God asked him, ‘ Who are you, although I know you.’ The young-man replied, ‘ I am thy brother Devil and have come to show thee how givest a blow to Heavenly God.’ ” The Devil then goes on to tell him that he can never conquer heaven or kill Heavenly God, and he counsels him to concentrate his efforts on destroying the true-believers.

This episode is interesting for the Devil here fills the rôle of Ohrmazd in the *Bundahishn*; for in reciting the *Ahuna Vairya* prayer Ohrmazd “ showed Ahriman his own final victory, the powerlessness of Ahriman, the destruction of the demons ”, and so on. In *Irradiant* it is the Devil who shows Lionish God that he cannot hope to conquer heaven or destroy his heavenly rival. The most that he can hope

to do is to destroy or convert the believers in Heavenly God. How and why it is the Devil who gives this truthful advice I shall try to explain in my next article. Suffice it to say that Lionish God follows the Devil's advice, and, just as Ahriman does in the Zoroastrian legend, he wins an instantaneous and crushing victory. Two of the four countries which worship Heavenly God are instantly overrun; their kings, of whom Irradiant's father is one, are slain, the population is either slaughtered or converted back to the worship of Lionish God and his brother, the Devil, the countryside is pillaged and wrecked, and the cities are demolished. The wreckage is complete. All this again tallies with the *Bundahishn* account and with the character of Ahriman "whose will is to smite and whose substance is envy".

In both accounts the Evil One's victory on earth, in the material world, is instant and apparently complete; but in both accounts it is really only the beginning of the end; and the counter-attack, when it comes, is relentless. As the *Bundahishn* says:

This too did Ohrmazd know in his omniscience, that within these nine thousand years three thousand would pass entirely according to the will of Ohrmazd, three thousand in mixture would pass according to the will of both Ohrmazd and Ahriman, and that in the last battle Ahriman would be made powerless and that he himself would save creation from aggression.

This chronology of the *Bundahishn* which is repeated throughout the Pahlavi texts does not appear in *Irradiant* except in one passage, but this is a crucial one. After Lionish God has crushed two of the kingdoms of the true-believers and slain Irradiant's father, there is a counter-attack in which Chandelier, not Irradiant, is the commander. The forces of Lionish God are expelled, and a great rite is celebrated commemorating the creation—a rite lasting six days and called in English the "general origination days". On reaching this point in the manuscript I thought that here at last we were going to be told the secret doctrines of whatever sect Ali Mirdrakvandi belonged to. I was, however, bitterly disappointed: forty-two pages had been left blank with only this note to explain the *lacuna*:

Notice: It is very difficult to write about what the true believers did during Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Yet despite this maddening *lacuna*, we do learn that for three thousand years men will forget to prostrate themselves before Heavenly God—this surely a dim memory of those three thousand years which "pass according to the will of both Ohrmazd and Ahriman".

I hope that I have said enough to convince you that there exists in the folklore of Luristān an Epic which, in its oldest level, is based on the Zoroastrian religious myth of the conflict between Ohrmazd and Ahriman, God and the Devil. The resemblances are too many and too exact to be fortuitous.

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ZOROASTRIAN SURVIVALS IN IRANIAN FOLKLORE II

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1. INTRODUCTION
BY PHILIP G. KREYENBROEK
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The paper published here is based on the last of two lectures delivered by the late Professor R. C. Zaehner at the British Institute of Persian Studies in Tehran in the early 1960s, on the subject of the long epic story *Irradiant* by Ali Mirdrakvandi. The first part appeared in *Iran* III (1965), pp. 87–96.¹ The present article, however, was never published and was widely believed to have disappeared. The same was true of the manuscript of Ali Mirdrakvandi's work itself. Most Iranists, therefore, have shelved the Mirdrakvandi question as a fascinating but insoluble enigma for well over twenty years. By pure coincidence, the present writer discovered recently that the Mirdrakvandi papers, including the manuscript of *Irradiant* and a typescript of the present article, were still in the possession of Mr. J. F. B. Hemming, of Falmouth, Cornwall. Mr. Hemming had been Mirdrakvandi's friend and mentor in Tehran in the early 1940s, and it was he who encouraged Mirdrakvandi to write the work. The manuscript of *Irradiant* is bequeathed to the Bodleian Library after Mr. Hemming's death, but Mr. Hemming has kindly allowed the present writer to keep it at SOAS for an indefinite period of time.

In view of the lapse of time since the question was last discussed in print, it may be useful to recall the main facts of the case. *Irradiant* was written in English by a self-taught man from Luristan, Ali Mirdrakvandi. Mirdrakvandi came from the village of Reihan, near Andimeshk, in Luristan. His parents had been "taken away by soldiers" and were never heard of again, and he was brought up by his grandfather who "was wild"; the grandfather told him the story of *Irradiant* when he took the boy on hunting expeditions.

Mirdrakvandi, who appears to have had a near-obsessive wish to learn English, attached himself to British and American military circles in Tehran in the early 1940s, doing odd jobs for them and asking them to correct his English, his special patron being Mr. Hemming. Contacts with the latter began in August 1943. After correcting a steady stream of letters and short compositions, Mr. Hemming asked Mirdrakvandi if he knew a story he could write down. Thus prompted, Mirdrakvandi began the 600,000-word story of *Irradiant* in early May 1944. When Mr. Hemming left Iran well before *Irradiant* was completed, an official in the British Embassy took care of

Mirdrakvandi, and saw to it that the rest of the manuscript reached Mr. Hemming in England. When the work was completed, Mr. Hemming contacted SOAS, and eventually Professor Zaehner, who had known Mirdrakvandi in Tehran, took charge of the manuscript.

Professor Zaehner was clearly fascinated from the start by the unmistakable structural likeness between the latter part (Book II) of Mirdrakvandi's work, and the Zoroastrian Cosmogony as found in the *Bundahišn* and the work of Zādsparam: the opposition between "Heavenly God" and "Lionish God" results in an attack by the latter, which is repulsed; this is followed by an "Agreement" between the two powers to wage war until either is destroyed. During his next attack, Lionish God hears a triple pronouncement by Heavenly God, and is again defeated. This defeat is only temporary, however, and the rest of the book describes the long-drawn battle between the two opposing forces until the boy *Irradiant*, Heavenly God's earthly champion, finally triumphs.

Zaehner, who had argued earlier that the Lion-headed divinity of Roman Mithraism represented Ahriman rather than Zurvan,² regarded the evidence of *Irradiant* as confirmation of this view. Lionish God is the opponent of Heavenly God, he suffers from "after-knowledge", and his role in *Irradiant* is very similar to that of Ahriman in the Zoroastrian Cosmogony; it could therefore be surmised that the lion was a widely recognised symbol of Ahriman. However, as the middle part of the present article shows, such an identification is not without problems. A clear distinction is made in the story between the Devil, who is Lionish God's brother, and L.G. himself, who cannot be called wholly evil, and has in fact helped mankind to survive in the world.

The above description can hardly fail to remind one of the Yezīdī divinity Melek Tāʾūs, about whom very similar claims are made. In fact, it is one of the merits of Zaehner's work that he already pointed to the links between the evidence of *Irradiant*, Roman Mithraism, and the mythology of the Yezīdīs and the Ahl-e Ḥaqq; in his first article on *Irradiant*, Zaehner announced his intention of exploring these links more fully—a task he sadly did not live to complete.

By a remarkable coincidence, however, Zaehner's second article on Mirdrakvandi has reappeared at a time when such questions are once more being discussed by historians of religion in the light of new insights. In a series of articles, the present writer has

pointed to Avestan evidence for the existence of an older, pre-Zoroastrian version of the Iranian cosmogony, which bears a striking resemblance both to the cosmogony of the Vedas and, as far as one can judge, to that of Roman Mithraism.³ Unmistakable traces of this ancient myth can be found, moreover, in the mythology of the Yezīdīs and the Ahl-e Ḥaqq⁴ and, as will be seen, the myth may well provide a clue to the original identity of Mirdrakvandi's Lionish God.

Like the ancient Indians, the pre-Zoroastrian Iranians believed that the world had been created in two stages. During the first, embryonic stage, the prototypes of the creations existed motionless, in a confined dark space enveloped by the narrow stone sky. Then Mithra, the primeval Sacrificer and Lord of Fire, came forth from the stone sky, and performed the first sacrifice, thus bringing motion, growth, warmth and light to the earth, and "creating" the world as we know it. The Vedic evidence suggests, however, that at some stage, probably during the migrations, a new ethos became prominent among the "proto-Indoaryans",⁵ which idealised the values of a martial, "heroic" age, and led to a strong cult of the amoral, warlike god Indra. In the course of time, Indra then absorbed many of the functions of the more "priestly" divinity Mitra, including his role in the "second act of creation". As T. Burrow has shown, it is probable that Zarathustra's people had renewed contacts with the "proto-Indoaryans" before the latter conquered the subcontinent.⁶ Zoroastrianism may well have been born of the clash between the more traditional worldview of Iranians like Zarathustra and the innovations of Indra-worship. As is well known, the final result of this confrontation was that, in the Zoroastrian cosmogony, an act strikingly similar to Mithra's original sacrifice (which has been usurped, in some milieux, by Indra),⁷ was attributed to the evil Ahriman, and was believed to have brought about a fall from grace whose effects must eventually be undone. While Indra became one of the chief demons of Zoroastrianism,⁸ Mithra, divested of his creative functions, remained a great *yazata*.

It is now widely recognised that Zoroastrianism developed in Eastern Iran long before it became prominent in western parts of the country,⁹ which implies that a pre-Zoroastrian form of the Iranian religion must have flourished there for centuries; eventually, some sort of confrontation must therefore have taken place between this faith and Zoroastrianism. A major problem in the Zoroastrianisation of Western Iran must have been the status of Mithra. He was a great god in both religions, but the one acclaimed him as the divinity whose bull-sacrifice brought about the glorious second stage of creation, while the other regarded this as the deplorable result of Ahriman's murder of the Uniquely-created Bull. The evidence of Roman Mithraism (which must have been

at least partly inspired by a myth closely resembling the one outlined here), as well as the internal evidence of the Iranian tradition, strongly suggests that Mithra continued to have strong popular appeal in Western Iran for a long time. At this popular level, however, confusion must have been rife as regards beliefs about Mithra's character, the implications of his creative functions, and his relations with Ahriman.

It seems plausible, then, to assume that the mythologies of Roman Mithraism (which recognises *Deus Arimanius*, whose origin must almost certainly be Zoroastrian, but attributes pre-Zoroastrian functions to Mithra), of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq (which, alongside many "Zoroastrian" features, contains a positive account of the "second act of creation", accompanied by a "Pact" and the sacrifice of a bull),¹⁰ and of the Yezīdism (with its veneration for Melek Tā'ūs),¹¹ reflect the various permutations of the original myth which developed under the influence of such perplexities. The same appears to be true of *Irradiant*, whose structure (with its characteristic preoccupation with the Final Battle), is clearly based on the Zoroastrian cosmogony, while one of its protagonists (viz. Lionish God, who claims to be the creator of this world, but is not the original Creator of all; who rules over the world and is both good and wicked), shows traits which may well derive from older beliefs.

Inevitably, the question then arises how we should understand and interpret all this: was Mirdrakvandi schooled by his grandfather in the esoteric lore of a known or unknown sect, as Zaehner seemed to suspect, or do the facts admit of a less spectacular explanation? Clearly, one can only guess. Mr. Hemming informs me that the question of Mirdrakvandi's original religion was never discussed; certainly he never claimed that his story was anything more than that, nor did he suggest that he himself belonged to any special group—but then a member of such a group might well have practised *taqiyeḥ* and hidden his religious identity. Two other facts may be more significant. First, while *Irradiant* shares with the religion of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq its characteristic tendency of reducing the divine beings of old to human size, which gives ancient myths a peculiar sense of immediacy, the autobiographical aspects of this story¹² seem to take this so far that one can hardly imagine that, for the author, the tale represented Religious Truth. If Mirdrakvandi's "wild" grandfather was in fact an Ahl-e Ḥaqq *kalāmkh'ān*, or the guardian of the sacred traditions of a similar sect, he would seem to have inculcated in his grandson remarkably little respect for such precious knowledge. Secondly, one of the main themes of Book II is the attraction, and eventually the marriage, between *Irradiant* and the daughter of Lionish God. This theme, that of the union between a new ruler and the daughter of the last king of the old era, is an ancient one in Western Iran,¹³ but it does not appear to belong

to the religious tradition. Again, this does not prove much, but it makes it seem less probable that the story as a whole is based on the religious teachings of a sect. It seems more likely, therefore, that in *Irradiant* we have tangible evidence of the “substratum of ancient lore” whose existence has so often been claimed to explain the origins of such sects as the Yezīdīs and the Ahl-e Ḥaqq: the intellectual and cultural heritage of a group or tribe, which is transmitted, added to and modified down the centuries. While such lore does not generally have the status of “religious” knowledge, it is so deeply rooted in the culture that, in some cases, efforts to integrate its truth with that of “official” religion probably led to the development of new religious beliefs.

2. THE TEXT OF ZAEHNER'S LECTURE

In my last lecture, I tried to show how faithfully and how surprisingly the myth of Ohrmazd and Ahriman, which is basic to Zoroastrian dualism, has been preserved throughout the centuries in the folklore of Luristan. Let me recapitulate the parallelisms.

In both the Pahlavi text and in *Irradiant* there is an initial attack on the powers of light by the powers of darkness which fails. Next, the good God offers peace to the Evil One, who rejects it. Peace having become impossible, the two sides enter into a treaty or agreement which can only result in the total destruction of one or the other. This is followed by the Evil One's second attack on the powers of light, and this in turn is defeated by the good God's utterance of a triple invocation which causes the Evil One to lose consciousness and to fall hurtling into the depths from which he had originally come. Up to this point, there is almost complete agreement between the two accounts. At this stage, however, there is a difference.

In the account of the Pahlavi books, Ahriman can only be brought back to consciousness by the boasts of a mysterious character call Jēh or Jāh, the “Primal Whore”, who stirs him up with these words:

Arise, O our father, for in that battle I shall let loose so much affliction on the Blessed Man and the toiling bull that, because of my deeds, they will not be fit to live: and I shall destroy their dignity: I shall afflict the water; I shall afflict the plants; I shall afflict all the creation of Ohrmazd!

At these words, Ahriman is comforted, his strength is restored and he delivers his devastatingly successful attack on the material creation of Ohrmazd.

In *Irradiant*, too, Lionish God needs comforting before he can deliver his own brilliantly successful attack on the true believers. His comforter, however, is no longer the “Primal Whore”, a thoroughly Zoroastrian character, but the Devil who is his brother. The Devil explains how it is not possible to destroy Heavenly God; the best that Lionish God can hope for is to destroy or convert the true believers

away from Heavenly God to allegiance to himself. Acting on this advice, Lionish God attacks, wins a decisive victory, and proceeds to kill, destroy, and defile everything in the conquered territory, much as Ahriman had done in the Pahlavi books.

It seems, then, fairly clear that whatever the direct source of *Irradiant* was, it borrowed the cosmic myth of Ohrmazd and Ahriman from Zoroastrian mythology but fitted it into a different context. This is no longer the original duel between the two deities that takes place at the beginning of time, but the last stage in the titanic struggle—the struggle that takes place during those three thousand years “in mixture which would pass according to the will of both Ohrmazd and Ahriman”. This is the time when, according to Shahrastānī, Ahriman “went forth and mastered the world”.

Perhaps it is silly to speak of the “theology” of a fairy-tale, but this particular fairy-tale is, in places, thoroughly theological. Here we have two rival gods, each claiming to be the creator. There is, however a great difference between them. Heavenly God claims to be the creator not only of heaven and earth but of other orders of existence of which both human beings and Lionish God are ignorant; he also claims that it is he himself who has given Lionish God authority over earth (MS 79), while Lionish God on his side claims to be unoriginated and immortal. He claims to be the creator of the earth, the sea, and all the creatures that are in them (MS 603).

This is not by any means an orthodox Zoroastrian belief, for in some ways it is more reminiscent of the Gnostic Demiurge who creates the material world under the impression that he is the supreme deity and makes rather a mess of it. However that may be, this limited claim of Lionish God reflects, too, a passage from the *Bundahishn* which is the Zoroastrian equivalent of the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis. This is what the *Bundahishn* says:

The first thing they [the first human couple] said was this: “Ohrmazd created water, the earth, plants, cattle, the stars, the moon, and the sun, and all fertile things” Then the Aggressor (Ahriman) assailed their mind and corrupted it; and they cried out: “Ahriman created water, the earth, plants and other things.” When they pronounced this first lie which ruined them, they spoke in accordance with the will of the demons. This first joy did Ahriman [steal] from them [and] make his own. For this lie both were damned; and their souls [shall remain] in hell till the Final Body (*Greater Bundahishn*, p. 102).

What is significant in this “first lie” of our first parents is that, having first ascribed the creation of all things to Ohrmazd, they then, corrupted by the Evil Spirit, attribute the earthly creation to Ahriman; they do not attribute the creation of the heavenly bodies to him. This theory, which attributes the world and all that it contains to Ahriman and the heavenly lights

only to Ohrmazd, is precisely the belief of the worshippers of Lionish God in Irradiant. As far as Lionish God is concerned, he does not demand faith from the heavenly creatures, over which he admits that Heavenly God has supreme power; but he does claim the earth as his own and intensely resents Heavenly God's assertion of jurisdiction over it and the attempt of Irradiant and other true believers to wrest it from his grasp. Here surely we have a survival of the belief of the *dēvsnān* or "demon worshippers" so often attacked in the Avesta and Pahlavi books.

What do we know of these so-called "demon worshippers"? The Persian for demon is *dīv* (Middle Persian *dēv*, Old Persian *daiva*, Avestan *daēva*). All these words correspond to the Sanskrit *deva* and are etymologically connected with the Latin *deus*. Originally, they must have been gods.

In the Avesta there are two words for supernatural beings, *ahura* and *daēva*, and these correspond etymologically exactly to the Sanskrit *asura* and *deva*. In the Rig-Veda, the earliest literary monument of the whole Indo-European group of races, both terms mean divine beings, the *asuras* being more remote from man, the *devas* closer to him. In the course of time, however, the *asuras*, who always had an uncanny element in them, became purely maleficent powers, whereas the *devas* remained gods similar to the gods of Greece and Rome and other Indo-European peoples.

In Iran, however, exactly the opposite happened. Owing to the reform of the Prophet Zoroaster, no *ahura* was any longer allowed to exist in his own right, and Ahura Mazdāh, the "Wise Lord", was raised to the position of the one true God, maker of heaven and earth and all that in them is. The *daēvas*, on the other hand, were regarded by the Iranian Prophet as being maleficent powers, the henchmen of Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, whose real origins remain obscure. The Zoroastrian reform, however—which put an exalted monotheism in the place of the more ancient polytheism which the Iranians had formerly shared with their Aryan cousins who had moved on into India—this Zoroastrian reform was far too radical and politically too weak to eliminate the worship of the *daēvas* altogether. In what was later to become Zoroastrian orthodoxy, a place was made for many of the old *ahuras* like Mithra and Anāhitā, but not for the old *daēvas*, whose cult was in all probability associated with bloody sacrifice; and it is this cult, in my opinion, which reappears in Mithras' sacrifice of the Bull in the Mithraism of the Roman Empire.

It seems plain, however, that the cult of the *daēvas* co-existed with orthodox Zoroastrianism until the reign of Xerxes, when it seems to have been suppressed, at least officially. It maintained an underground existence, however, in all probability up to Muslim times as the constant attacks on it in the Pahlavi books show. The suppression of the cult of the *daēvas* is

commemorated by Xerxes in these words:

Within these provinces there were places where previously the *daivas* had been worshipped. Then by the will of Ahura Mazdāh I destroyed that temple of the *daivas*, and I made a proclamation [saying], "The *daivas* shall not be worshipped". Where the *daivas* had previously been worshipped, there did I worship Ahura Mazdāh in accordance with Truth and using the proper rite.

In the Avesta, the Zoroastrians or "worshippers of Ahura Mazdāh" refer to themselves as *ašavan*—"followers of Truth" and to their opponents or "demon-worshippers" as *drəgvant-* (*drvant-*) "followers of the Lie", and this passion for truth has always been characteristic of Iranian religion in general. This emerges from the pages of Herodotus, too, who is describing popular Iranian religion, not Zoroastrianism proper. "The most disgraceful thing in the world, they think," he writes, "is to tell a lie; the next worst to owe a debt; because, among other things, the debtor is obliged to tell lies (1.138)." This passion for truth is equally characteristic of the Gāthās of Zoroaster and the inscriptions of Darius the Great; it is the very hallmark of Zoroastrianism.

How do matters stand in Irradiant? Not too well, I am afraid. For throughout this immense story, victory is gained quite as much by strategic deception as by valour. Lionish God is inveigled into attacking heaven by one of Irradiant's allies on the grounds that Heavenly God had no armies, only "several bands of angels" who themselves had no armour, "nor could they fight". Similarly, Lionish God is persuaded to make his second attack on heaven by Chandelier who first wins his confidence by doing obeisance to him with infinite servility and then gives him a map of heaven which, in the event, proves to have no relation to the truth. And as far as deception goes, Irradiant is, if anything worse than Chandelier.

Nor does Heavenly God appear to be above deception himself, or at least his angels are not, for during Lionish God's first attack on heaven.

Suddenly ten angels appeared before the Lionish God and a tied lion with them on their necks. They prostrated themselves before the Lionish God. The Lionish God asked them "This lion is the most beautiful of all, why have you tied him?" The angels replied and they said "This lion is the same Heavenly God whom thou wantest to kill or capture. We have captured him and brought him tied to thee."

The tied lion is, of course, not Heavenly God and admits it when he is carried off to earth. Lionish God realises that he has been deceived, and says

"Then why did the angels lie, they said that you were Heavenly God and the creatures in heaven should not lie." The tied lion answered and said "Yea, the heavenly creatures never lie, but as Heavenly God did not want to disappoint His creatures and [wanted] to persuade them, and moreover, as He knew that thou wert a foolish lionish god, He made some of his angels lie to thee."

I will not attempt to explain away this anomaly although there are many ways in which this could be done. I would simply say that in this story there are innumerable different strands, some dating from very ancient times, and some from as late as 1947. It would be foolish to look for complete consistency between the pre-Muslim Zoroastrian tradition and a fairy-tale from Lorestan which has only now come to light.

And yet, despite this lapse, the Zoroastrian detestation of the Lie (which in their parlance is simply another word for evil) does emerge later. After the tied lion has proved his wisdom and his power to work miracles by the power of Heavenly God, Lionish God casts him into prison. His daughter, however, Twinkling Starlet, who was later to be converted to Heavenly God and marry Irradiant, was allowed to visit and question him. "Answer me truthfully, please," she says, "Are you Heavenly God?" "No, no, I am not Heavenly God; Heavenly God has created me, you and thousands of worlds full of creatures. How can I tell you a lie (TS X 28)". This idea is developed a few pages on. The tied lion is offered food by Twinkling Starlet, but he declines on the ground that only heavenly food is suitable for the dwellers in heaven. "Heavenly God will send me my daily aliment which is heavenly food," he says.

"Now ask him to send you your daily aliment, if you are speaking the truth," said Twinkling Starlet. "I am not hungry", answered the tied lion. "Lie to Him and tell Him that you are hungry," said Twinkling Starlet. The tied lion laughed and said, "Lies are never used up there in heaven, the creatures of Heaven never lie; moreover, Heavenly God is warned from the hearts of the creatures. He knows when his creatures are hungry and when they need anything".

The principle of truthfulness is thereby upheld, although it is realised that not all are strong enough to abide by it; and the principle is reaffirmed by the lion who is indeed God's messenger on earth when he again refused to lie even under duress. "Your father," he says to Twinkling Starlet, "wants me to lie for him and I never lie" (TS XI 3).

Thus, though in the bulk of the tale the worshippers of Heavenly God are even more addicted to deceit than their enemies, the principle that to lie is wrong is thrice affirmed by the tied lion who is God's messenger to Twinkling Starlet. Much later in the book (MS 2251), the absolute incompatibility of truth and falsehood is affirmed by Irradiant himself, and at the very end of the work all manner of lies and deception are condemned as mortal sin by the only true believer in the whole book who appears to live up to his own standards. This character who, along with many other true believers from the West, turns up for the last battle against Lionish God, has the quite extraordinary name of Western Bawl. I cannot, however, seriously maintain that Western Bawl has anything to do with Zoroastrianism; he seems to belong to the very latest

stratum of this Epic, and his condemnation of a great many things as "mortal sin" points to only one source. Nobody, so far as I know, talks much about mortal sin except Roman Catholics, and the more recently they are converted the more they tend to be obsessed by this disagreeable idea. It was in 1946 here in Tehran that I became a Catholic and it was very shortly afterwards that I met Ali Mirdrakvandi. I obviously indoctrinated him more than I remember, and I can therefore confidently say that the views of Western Bawl have little or nothing to do with Zoroaster but they have plenty to do with me. This must serve as a caution, for were this fact not known, Western Bawl's detestation of the Lie might well have been attributed to Zoroastrian influence. Yet despite all this, I am convinced that in Irradiant there is much genuinely Zoroastrian material.

Now let us take the question of the "true believers" and the "heathens" who worship Lionish God in Irradiant. Let us see what they in fact believe and to what, if anything, in Zoroastrianism they correspond. The "heathen", to take them first, worship Lionish God as the creator or at least as a creator; and this we have seen to be characteristic of the "demon worshippers" of pre-Muslim times. This they do because they believe him to be omnipotent and omniscient in his own sphere, that is, on earth. They do this out of self-interest, for, as Lionish God himself points out, Heavenly God is millions of miles away (MS 1299) and for that reason, one must suppose, incapable of bringing effective aid to his devotees. Moreover, Lionish God not only claims to be a creator; he also claims to increase his worshippers' livelihood, to give them health and wealth—prosperity on earth and joy in the paradise of his brother, Master Devil, which is "down there". Leaving the Devil aside for the moment, let us compare this with what we learn about the demon worshippers from the Pahlavi books. This, alas, is not very much, but it does tally with what we learn from Irradiant.

To start off, they are indifferently called "demon worshippers" and "magicians", and wizards are very prominent too in the entourage of Lionish God (the Persian word presumably being *jādū*, corresponding to Pahlavi *Yātūk*) but are wholly absent from the forces of Irradiant and his allies. Similarly, just as Lionish God bestows health, wealth and "increase of livelihood", so we learn from one of the few passages in which the demon-worshippers are allowed to speak for themselves (*Dēnkart*, ed. Madan, 634.14) that it was just these gifts which the demons claimed to provide:

Then did we take counsel with the demons. When we crave of them lordship and leadership, they grant it to us; and when we crave richness in flocks and wealth, they grant it to us.

Similarly in another passage (Pahlavī *Yasna*, 32.5) the demons are represented as deceiving men with promises of "good life and deathless progress"

(*huzvišnih ut amarg-ravišnih*) and by saying that lordship comes from Ahriman. Further, they prefer wealth to virtue (*ibid.*, 12). All this is equally true of the kingdom of Lionish God which is this earth. It would, then, seem that in the view of the demon worshippers, Ahriman was responsible for dispensing health, wealth and power because he was prince of this world. This is what Lionish God claims in *Irradiant*, and it is to smash this pretension that *Irradiant* wages war on him. There seems every reason to believe, then, that the worshippers of Lionish God are the lineal descendents of the “demon worshippers” of the Avesta and Pahlavi books.

Apart from their motives for worshipping Lionish God, what did these “heathens” believe? First, they believe that Lionish God is the creator and originator of this earth, the sea and all the creatures in them, including man (Lionish God is continually addressed as “O my creator”), but they also believe in a vague way that there is a God in heaven who is invisible and has little or no power over earthly affairs. In this sense, they are as dualist as the orthodox Zoroastrian dualists: here are two creators, not one. There is duality from the very beginning, just as there is in the *Bundahishn*, and the purpose of the struggle between the two principles is for the one to destroy the other, so that only one creator and one God remains. The aim of both is to unify an original duality: Ohrmazd by promoting growth which alone can squeeze out the negative principle of violence, and Ahriman by destroying everything that will not submit to him. This idea is, amazingly, reproduced by Lionish God in his so-called “agreement”: “The war between me and Heavenly God shall continue until Heavenly God be destroyed and the originator of all becomes one, who I am” (TS XII 4).

So, just as Lionish God is an authentic successor to the Zoroastrian Ahriman, so are his devotees the authentic successors to the “demon worshippers” of the Avesta, Xerxes’ inscriptions and the Pahlavi books. The latter, moreover, worshipped not only Ahriman but also a plurality of “demons”; they were in fact polytheists. So, too in the first book of *Irradiant*, before we learn of the existence of Lionish God, we learn about the “fetish houses” of the heathens, and the “fetishes” (probably translating Persian *bot*) are many.

Lionish God, then, and his followers are both polytheists and dualists: they believe in two principles, and of these they believe Lionish God to be the ultimate victor. The story of *Irradiant* proves them wrong, just as the Zoroastrian myth proves that Ahriman must in the end be destroyed. Theologically, the two myths are identical. In the beginning there are two principles: in the end there will be only one since one or the other must ultimately be annihilated.

“Master Devil” (Persian *hažrat-e Shaytān?*) or Satan, as he is sometimes called, is rather a shadowy figure in

Irradiant. According to one of his devotees, he is “more beautiful than *Irradiant*” and he appears to Lionish God in a dream as a “very beautiful young man”. Moreover, he rules over Lionish God’s paradise, for Lionish God claims to have a paradise as well as a hell. I do not pretend to be able to explain the origin of this supremely beautiful Devil who is also the lord of paradise. All that I can suggest is that he may have been a duplication of the Zoroastrian God, Ohrmazd. On the one hand he is Heavenly God, who, though a God of peace, is in self-defence the eternal enemy of Lionish God; on the other he is the ruler of paradise and brother of Lionish God. The idea of Ohrmazd and Ahriman being brothers goes right back to the *Gāthās*, our oldest Zoroastrian source, usually thought to have been composed by Zoroaster himself. There we read:

In the beginning those two Spirits who are the well-endowed (?) twins were known as the one good and the other evil in thought, word and deed. Between them the wise chose rightly, not so the fools. And when these Spirits met, they established in the beginning life and death, that in the end the followers of the Lie should meet with the worst existence, but the followers of Truth with the Best Mind. Of these two Spirits, he who was of the Lie chose to do the worst things; but the Most Holy Spirit, clothed in rugged heaven, [chose] Truth as did [all] who sought with zeal to do the pleasure of the Wise Lord by [doing] good works. Between the two, the *daēvas* did not choose rightly; for, as they deliberated, delusion overcame them so that they chose the most Evil Mind. Then did they, with one accord, rush headlong unto Fury, that they might thereby extinguish (?) the existence of mortal men (*Yasna* 30.3–6).

This, of course, is one of the classical texts of Zoroastrian dualism, but it will be noted that the two Spirits are described as twins, just as Lionish God and the Devil are brothers. Could it be that, among the so-called “demon worshippers” these two primordial twins were seen not as enemies but as friends? This is not impossible, for we read in the *Dēnkart* (Madan, 893.10) that the demon worshippers “propagate the religion of Ahriman in the name of Ohrmazd”. If this is so then Ahriman would be, for them, the undisputed ruler of this world who has power to send people not only to hell but also to heaven over which Ohrmazd (replaced by an all-beautiful Devil in *Irradiant*) rules.

Alternatively, Lionish God and the Devil may represent Ahriman and Ohrmazd, Heavenly God Zurvān, Infinite Time, who, in many non-Zoroastrian texts, is represented as being the father of Ohrmazd and Ahriman. For there were at least three types of Zoroastrianism in the Sasanian period. The first, represented by the Pahlavi books, was purely dualist. Ohrmazd and Ahriman are co-eternal principles of light and darkness, good and evil; both are eternal and have no origin; there can be no peace nor compromise between them. The second type, usually called Zurvānite, basing itself on the passage from the *Gāthās*

which we have just quoted, maintained that, since the two deities are twins they must have a common father, and that this father was Zurvān of Infinite time. We might then try to explain Heavenly God in Irradiant as Zurvān and the Devil and Lionish God as Ohrmazd and Ahriman. Against this interpretation, however, must be set the almost exact correspondences between the accounts of the Pahlavi books which are wholly dualist on the one hand and of Irradiant on the other which show that Heavenly God must in fact represent Ohrmazd. But the Zurvānite version of the origin of Ohrmazd and Ahriman seem itself to have been a rationalisation of the Gāthic passage I have just quoted. In that passage, it is the Holy Spirit and the Evil Spirit who are twins, not Ahura Mazdāh (Ohrmazd) and the Evil Spirit (Ahriman). In later times, Ahura Mazdāh and the Holy Spirit were identified, but in the Gāthās they were not, for in *Yasna* 47.2–3 Ahura Mazdāh appears as the father of the Holy Spirit. It is just conceivable that this idea may survive in Irradiant. Heavenly God corresponding to Ahura Mazdāh (Ohrmazd), Master Devil to the Holy Spirit, and the Lionish God to the Evil Spirit (Ahriman). I cannot pretend that this is more than an intriguing hypothesis, and it does, of course, leave quite unexplained how on earth the Devil—even though he is a very beautiful Devil—came to replace the Holy Spirit. And yet, stranger things than this have happened in the history of religion, for among the Mandaeans the Holy Spirit of Judaism and Christianity appears as the source of all evil!

Al-Shahrastānī, in his *Kitāb al-milal wa 'l-niḥal* mentions three types of Zoroastrianism: orthodox dualists, Zurvānites and a third sect which maintained that Ahriman or the Devil arose from an original doubt or evil thought of God, that is Ohrmazd. Al-Baghdādī, another Muslim heresiographer, who died in A.D. 1037, also repeatedly refers to the Majūs or Magians and, so far from attributing to them a categorical dualism, declares that they believed that God created Ahriman and that between them they manage the affairs of the world, God doing only what is good, and Ahriman doing only what is evil (*al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, ed. Kawtharī, pp. 153, 171, 172, 177, 200; tr. Halkin, pp. 63, 115, 118, 131).

This would appear to be precisely what the “true believers” believe in Irradiant. Or is this to push the analogy too far? One thing is certain, and that is that the true believers are monotheists, worshippers of one God only, who view the devil as being God’s original adversary. Is it not, then, much more straightforward to interpret this story of religious war as a war between the strictly monotheistic Muslims on the one hand and Zoroastrian dualists on the other? More straightforward, perhaps, but not wholly convincing.

As I have said earlier, there are several different strata to this Epic, the earliest of which seems to be

Zoroastrian and the latest of which are Mr. Hemming (fairly broad Anglican) and myself (at that time rather narrowly Roman Catholic). But whereas these last two strata are easily recognisable, and whereas the resemblances to the Zoroastrian myth, if not to Zoroastrian doctrine, are very striking indeed, there is surprisingly little in this huge work that is specifically Muslim. Only two passages strike me as being undoubtedly Muslim in origin. The first is when, after Irradiant’s first victory, his “chaplains” (the word no doubt dates from the Hemming period) explain the true nature of the Devil to the conquered heathen whose “generations had been worshipping the Devil from the old years” (MS 114). There are some embellishments, but the core of the story comes from the Qur’ān. This is the story as it appears in Irradiant:

The Devil was a worshipful creature before the human [race] had been created. He had sincerely been worshipping God for 1,000 years. So God had made the Devil the President of a few thousand angels: but when Adam was created, God said to all his angels and other of his creatures, “Prostrate yourselves before Adam”, so all the Angels and all the other creatures prostrated themselves before except for the Devil, who did not prostrate himself before Adam, and moreover spat in Adam’s face (this is not from the Qur’ān). God said to the Devil, thrice, “Prostrate yourself before Adam.” But the Devil would not accept, and he replied, “I shall never bow myself down before Adam, for he is made from dust, and dust is the lowest thing”.

So God sent him to hell, but in return for his past service he granted him access to the human heart and life until the day of judgement. All this comes from the Qur’ān and later traditional teaching.

So, too, at the end of the six days’ feast called the “General Origination Days” pictures of Adam and the Devil are produced: the first is treated with the greatest respect while the second is pelted with mud and stones. This, of course, recalls Satan’s epithet *al-rajīm* “the stoned”, which occurs twice in the Qur’ān and the ceremonial stoning of him which forms part of the Pilgrimage. Apart from this, there is nothing in the whole huge story which would disclose that the author was even nominally a Muslim.

In our last lecture, we saw that Heavenly God does bear a close resemblance to the Zoroastrian Ohrmazd in that He patiently endures the injuries that Lionish God inflicts on His creatures and tries to inflict on himself; he “is never angry neither beats his creatures”. Lionish God’s anger, on the other hand, is constantly mentioned; indeed, “no anger like the anger of Lionish god had been found in history” (MS 2259). Now, it is just this that the Pahlavi books, and particularly the *Shikand-Gumānik Vičār*, bring up against the Islamic God: he is more like Ahriman than he is like the good God, Ohrmazd. “Like Ahriman”, we read, “his anger with a single one of his sinless servants destroys and leads astray countless numbers of his own creatures”

(*ShGV*, 12.45); or more strongly still, “[The Muslim] God is more evil and more sinful than Ahriman [Himself] (*ibid.*, 11.373)”. This is certainly not true of the Heavenly God of Irradiant: he is primarily a God of love and wishes happiness even to Lionish God, although He knows He will never repent. Moreover, He is invisible and a pure spirit; He is never spoken of in anthropomorphical language as is the Allah of the Qur’ān. Unlike Allah, who, according to Tradition, will be seen in heaven, the Zoroastrian god can never be seen even by the beatified. Thus in the *Book of Artāy Virāf* which describes the journeyings of that Zoroastrian Dante throughout the various hells and his final emergence into the presence of the All-Highest, we read that though Ohrmazd spoke to him and though he heard his voice, he saw no physical form: “When Ohrmazd spake in this manner, I was astonished; for I saw a light, but no body did I see. A voice I heard, and I knew that this was Ohrmazd” (*Artāy-Virāf Nāmak*, 101.10–12). Similarly, Lionish God hears the voice of Heavenly God, but neither he nor anyone else can ever see his form.

It is in the episode of the “tied lion” which Lionish God brings down from heaven and the dialogue that takes place between the lion and Lionish God that Heavenly God’s resemblance to the Zoroastrian Ohrmazd is most clearly seen. In other passages where the attributes of God are described, they might equally refer to the god of the Sūfis or the Christians. This is particularly marked in those passages in which the true believers explain the nature of the one true God to the conquered heathen. I have little doubt that the emphasis which the author puts on the love of God is due neither to Sūfī nor to indigenous Christian influence but to Mr. Hemming who often talked about religion, and particularly the Christian religion, to Mirdrakvandi. The reason I say this is that right at the end of the book we suddenly come across an outspokenly trinitarian formulation of the Deity: “In the name of the God, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost...” Not absolutely right, but as near as you could wish. For this I myself must take all the blame. If, then, Mirdrakvandi derived the ideas of the Trinity and mortal sin from me, then it is more than likely that he derived the idea of God as substantial love from Mr. Hemming.

It is, then, most difficult to disentangle what seem to be genuine Zoroastrian ideas of the Deity from those which Mirdrakvandi imbibed from Mr. Hemming and myself. One passage, however, appears to be genuinely antique. It occurs just before the six days’ feast of the General Origination Days in which, what appear to be the head of whatever sect Mirdrakvandi belonged to, opens the ceremonies and speaks about God. The head of the sect bears the extraordinary title (in English) of the High Pope (I have no idea what the Persian for this can have been, and, for all I know, I may be respon-

sible for this too). Be that as it may, at a point when I thought we were really going to learn something about the beliefs of the sect, the manuscript breaks off (at p. 1000) with the maddening but candid confession written in block capitals:

THE REMAINDER SPEECHES OF THE HIGH-POPE HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN!

This does indicate that at this point at least Mirdrakvandi was reproducing to the best of his ability what had been handed down to him by his grandfather. The terminology, however, is so Christian that, I think, whatever the grandfather actually said must have been re-interpreted in the light of what Mr. Hemming had said to him so much more recently. This God is essentially a God of love; He is Lover, Helper, Comforter and Redeemer (the last two terms almost certainly derived from contacts with Christians), and His kindness is infinite:

God is hundreds and hundreds times more kind to us than our fathers are. You are very kind to your children and to your brother: you like them exceedingly while they live on this earth. When they die you will be sad for them and will weep for them. But your sadnesses for them will last only two, three or ten, twenty or fifty days, or two or three months; then you will forget them. Yea, you will forget your brothers and your children after they die; and you will not like them like [in] before. Their Lover, Helper, Comforter and their Redeemer is God who like[s] them all the times. He is with them while they are upon this earth, while they are in[to] the tomb, while they are up there in heaven and while they will be everywhere (wherever they may be) (MS 998–9).

All this sounds thoroughly Christian as is the idea, found elsewhere in the book (MS 132), that the spirit of God, once it has been received, cannot be taken away, though this might well originate in Sūfism or even Zoroastrianism, as we shall see later. Yet even if the High Pope’s description of God may derive from Mr. Hemming rather than from an older tradition, his account of God’s creation of the world is, so far as I know, unparalleled. The world, it appears, was created in six days as in Genesis and the Qur’ān (in the Zoroastrian books it was also created in six stages), but God’s creative plan was conceived of in precisely half a minute; to be yet more precise, it was conceived of between “three o’clock and six minutes and a half minute past this midnight until seven minutes past midnight”. In commemoration of this the feast of the General Origination Days begins at six and a half minutes past three a.m.; and to ensure that it begins at exactly the right time, the High Pope has a watch which he repeatedly looks at before the ceremony begins.

Here we have perhaps the strangest feature of this really extraordinary book. Ancient myth and the modern world mingle with each other in the most

natural possible way. Everyone of any standing has a watch, the army commanders have telescopes, there are banks, newspapers, typewriters and identity cards; but despite all this, the hard core of the story remains ancient, and the modern embellishments are, I am almost sure, entirely due to what I can only describe as the genius of Ali Mirdrakvandi. These additions are, of course, easily recognised. What is not so easily recognised is just how much purely Christian material he has inserted into an originally Zoroastrian setting.

In my opinion, the great emphasis on the love of God is due to the direct Christian influence of Mr. Hemming. It may also owe something to Šūfism. However that may be, it is not typically Zoroastrian, for love is about as characteristic of the Zoroastrian Ohrmazd as it is of the Allah of the Qurʾān: it is there, but it is rarely specifically mentioned. Ohrmazd is rather a God of righteousness, truth and goodness; certainly He loves his creatures, but this is not an aspect of Him that is at all emphasised as it is in Christianity.

For the “true believers”, God is one and the creator of all things, including Lionish God. This, however, does not mean that He is the Muslim Allah, since orthodox Islam accepts the physical characteristics attributed to Allah in the Qurʾān *bi-lā kayf*, that is to say, while denying that the face and hands of God are comparable to human faces and hands, it asserts that they are nevertheless a face and hands in some sense, though in a sense that it would be presumptuous for human reason to try to fathom. For the true believers in Irradiant, however God, though omniscient, has nothing that is comparable to our physical organs. Like the Zoroastrian God, He is a pure spirit who can never be seen, but who can be heard. The “true believers” minimum creed is given in an ultimatum which they send to the heathens during one of the wars they wage against them. I shall quote the relevant parts, though this time I shall have to alter Mirdrakvandi’s English in places for the sake of clarity. This is what the true believers say:

All you heathen nations must know that Heavenly God has created you. Not only has He created you, He has created all the worlds and all the things which are in them and on them. Verily we say that we are not your enemies, but we are your friends. We have not come to kill you, neither have we come to take your goods and your money from you; nor have we come to deceive you like Lionish God does. We have only come to show you and hold up for your consideration your Original Creator who is Heavenly God. You have been deceived, so we are very, very sorry for you. Lionish God says that he has got all that Heavenly God has got. Heavenly God . . . can never be seen, but He sees everything. His Holy Spirit is in the heart of his creatures. He has no eye; but He sees all the doings of His creatures. He has no tongue, but if He speaks, all the worlds will hear his voice. His voice is not loud, that it should deafen the worlds: it is very soft but has a sound that all the worlds can hear. But Lionish God is not so.

All people can see him; even cats and dogs can see him. Lionish God cannot find out what is happening unless he asks. He eats and drinks all the time like Madam-One-Hoo (I have no idea what this can possibly mean) while your original Creator Heavenly God never eats and never drinks. Lionish God sleeps on his godly bed at night time like a tired pig: he doesn’t understand what has happened in his godly country until his people tell him in the morning; whereas your Original Creator, Heavenly God, never sleeps; He takes the best care of all His worlds. Lionish God is exceedingly angry sometimes like an intoxicated Qahramān; but your Original Creator never gets angry nor does He ever smite his creatures. If some of His creatures are persecuted, their own bad deeds have caused it. Your Original Creator, Heavenly God, has prepared two places for all His creatures; one is called Heaven and the other place is called Hell. If you want to go to hell, worship Lionish God . . . but if you wish to go up to heaven you must . . . have faith in your original Creator and your father, Heavenly God, and you must kill Lionish God. . . . Faith in Lionish God is unfirm and is likened to a glass which of a sudden will be broken . . . [but] faith in Heavenly God is likened unto a sharp sword which will be able to scarify the hardest metals and the hardest rocks. Therefore, by this thing that is faith in Heavenly God we will deliver you from the filthy hands of Lionish God (MS 1303 ff).

All this again is Zoroastrian rather than Muslim; worship of Ohrmazd/Heavenly God leads to heaven, worship of Ahriman/Lionish God leads to hell; but it is the Zoroastrianism according to al-Baghdādī denouncing the Zoroastrianism of the Pahlavi books. God is the creator of all things, including Ahriman, and between them they manage affairs of the world, as al-Baghdādī says. Similarly, in Irradiant (MS 79), Heavenly God bids Lionish God “Fear him who has given you authority over earth”.

The reference to the Holy Spirit which indwells the hearts of all creatures may date from the Hemming period, but I rather doubt it. The idea occurs elsewhere in the book and may be genuinely Zoroastrian. If so, it would correspond to the indwelling of the believer’s soul and body by Vahman (Avestan Vohu Manah), the Good Mind, which is reasonably common in the *Dēnkart* (e.g. 271.6; 278.19; 934.19).

Again, the description of heaven in Irradiant is Zoroastrian, not Muslim. Not much is said about it, and what is said seems to be contradictory. This is what the captive lion tells Twinkling Starlet about it:

[In] the world on which I have been created [one] does not eat or drink neither work, nor is there any season for us, like day, night, spring, summer nor any other season. I don’t say that we don’t eat. We do eat and drink, but we don’t urinate and excrete. We eat a kind of food that the creatures of earth have never seen nor will they [ever] see such nice food. We don’t buy food nor do we work, but Heavenly God gets us our food any time that we are hungry.

Heavenly food of which the Christians know nothing and which the Qurʾān mentions but does not

emphasise, is, for the Zoroastrian, the first of the delights of heaven experienced by the soul of the saved. "Then do they serve him with sweetest foods, even the butter of the early spring, so that the soul may take its ease after the three nights of terror at the bridge [of Judgement]" (*Mēnōk i Khrat*, 2.96–7). What appears to be a contradiction in *Irradiant* (in heaven one does not eat, yet one does eat food which is immediately supplied when one is hungry), is perhaps a clumsy attempt to reproduce the idea we find in the Pahlavi books that in heaven one only eats for pleasure, not to satisfy a want; for heavenly food differs from our food on earth; for on earth we either eat because we are hungry, or we eat for the pure pleasure of it; in heaven the pleasure motive is alone present. (*Dālastān i Dēnik*, 30.11).

Despite the many close parallelisms between *Irradiant* and the Pahlavi texts, it must not be forgotten that the religion depicted in *Irradiant* where Lionish God is the legitimate ruler of the world, is nearer both to Gnosticism and to Mithraism than it is to the orthodox dualism we find in the Pahlavi books. This is shown particularly in the attitude to death expressed throughout the book. In the Avesta and the Pahlavi books, death is a scourge inflicted on the world by Ahriman who is himself called "full of death", and total salvation can only be achieved once soul and body are re-united. In *Irradiant*, on the other hand, "Death is the greatest of God's gifts according to the heavenly books" (MS 204), though it is later said (by the purist Western Bawl) that "life and death are both happiness gifts". Yet the idea that death is a mercy is not entirely un-Zoroastrian since mourning for the dead is considered sinful, and in *Irradiant* the Queen of Pearlia, one of the earliest true believers and the wife of Chandelier, reproved excessive mourning over the dead and boasts that she herself did not weep at her father's death (MS 204).

One last brief point before I finish this long list of parallelisms between the Zoroastrian books and *Irradiant*. In the former, hell is situated in the north; and so too in *Irradiant*, it is in the north that Lionish God's kingdom is situated. By now I hope that, though you may have been bored, you will have been convinced that so many and such close resemblances cannot be due entirely to coincidence.

Much still needs to be done, and I am delighted to say that a pupil of mine has accepted the very considerable task of disentangling the various strands that go to make up this mighty Epic.¹⁴ We are fortunate in knowing that, during the writing of this work, Mirdrakvandi was influenced first by Mr. Hemming and secondly by me. For the mortal sins and the incongruous appearance right at the end of the work of the Holy Trinity I must accept responsibility, and Mr. Hemming is almost certainly responsible for the emphasis put on the love of God throughout the book.

What is far more puzzling, however is the mixing up of modern equipment with mediaeval and purely mythical material. This, I would think, is entirely due to Mirdrakvandi himself; yet how skilfully he does it! There seems nothing incongruous in one of the last scenes when Twinkling Starlet, having fallen in love with *Irradiant*, having been converted to the worship of Heavenly God, and having turned completely against her father, Lionish God, whom she no longer acknowledges as creator and whom she now execrates as "pig, dog, monkey" (MS 1570) should use a typewriter to issue a proclamation to the people and should have it printed in millions of copies. So too we find articles from American camp life filtering into the story—shoe-shines, cans of meat and tobacco, and, of course, Coca-Cola. Then there are accretions from Iranian civilian life—police stations (*kalāntārī*), chiefs of police (*rā'īs-e shahrbānī*), a labour office, the National Bank, banknotes and identity cards. The press, too, is very much in evidence; journalists are summoned to hear official announcements which are then distributed by newsboys, while the following words constantly recur: journalists, newsboys, gazettes, newspapers and the press itself. So intimately does the modern fit into the ancient that we even have a news-hag—hags being a species of non-human being who travel through the air at incredible speeds.

Again, tobacco plays an important part throughout the story, and this is, I think, not an innovation of Mirdrakvandi since two of the most important characters are addicted to it, Lionish God himself who is addicted to cigars, and Crazy Hero whom we meet with at the very beginning and who stays with us until the very end and who is badly addicted to pipe-smoking. Indeed, the whole character of Crazy Hero, who is *Irradiant*'s bosom friend, centres round his craving for tobacco. It is possible, of course, that Mirdrakvandi made up Crazy Hero himself, but this is difficult to believe because in the first aggressive war of *Irradiant* against Lionish God it is Crazy Hero's furious prowess that saves *Irradiant* from total defeat; he is part and parcel of the story. Moreover, he has a very definite character of his own, surly, taciturn and bad-tempered, but deeply attached to *Irradiant*. Moreover, unlike any of the other characters, he positively dislikes religion and is utterly bored by all the pomp and ceremony of the General Origination Days. I would be inclined to think that, perhaps in the eighteenth century there lived another Mirdrakvandi with as lively an imagination as Ali who introduced Crazy Hero into the story and supplied Lionish God with his cigars.

Be that as it may, there is one very strange discrepancy in the story. While on the civilian side of life we have everything from tobacco to Coca-Cola, from the National Bank to identity cards, on the military side we have nothing that is post-mediaeval: the

weapons are bows and arrows, swords, spears and clubs; and there are horses but no chariots. Air transport is, as in Solomon's day, by demon or hag who, as everyone knows, had the power to fly through the air. There is not a trace even of gunpowder, let alone of all the weapons that Ali Mirdrakvandi must have seen in the American and British camps in which he worked. Why this should be I simply do not know.

There are many other problems that this fascinating work presents, but I have only time to touch on one, sc. the proper names.

We are fortunate in knowing that Irradiant's real name is *Nūrafgan* and Chandelier's *Chehel-cherāgh*. For most of the others we are completely in the dark. Some are translated and go easily back into Persian; Crazy Hero is presumably *pahlavān-e dīvāneh* or *pahlavān-e majnūn*, Heroine Girl *dokhtar-e pahlavān*, Pearlia *keshvar-e dorr*, and so on. Others are recognisably Persian, such as Aladdin ('Alā' ud-dīn), Aboud, Elias, Ethiop Sadi (Sa'dī-e ḥabashī), Khagan, Jowshan Kabir, Changiz and Kuhzad. But there are also proper names which seem to me neither Persian, Turkish nor Arabic, such as Comle, Comelous, Argon, Greigow, Dartognek and Ketchy. For these I can offer no explanation at all.

These are only a few of the problems raised by this extraordinary book. As a scholar, I would have preferred that the work had come into my hands in Persian rather than in English and that it had been transmitted by someone less imaginative and less inventive than Ali Mirdrakvandi; but even so I find the work

as it stands not only fascinating for the similarities it shows with Zoroastrian mythology but also fascinating in its own right. The story itself is astonishingly well-constructed, and in the detail there is much that is really beautiful and there is wealth of imaginative writing. One gets bored, of course, as one does in all true epics, with the endless battles, but suddenly one's attention is arrested by some totally new and unexpected episode. Then there is the fascination of Mirdrakvandi's English. Though grammatically it is far from perfect, the mistakes, though often very comic, are almost always felicitous. Some of his phrases seem to me so much more graphic than correct English. So it seems to me that "Lionish God was beyond anger" is more vivid than "Lionish was exceeding wroth" or in more modern English, "Lionish God was exceedingly angry". And "infinite grateful" is somehow much more expressive than "infinitely grateful". Without knowing it Ali Mirdrakvandi has produced a near-masterpiece and it would be a great pity if the British and the Iranians between them did not make it their business to publish this epic saga, which is something really new and original in Iranian letters.

There is so much else I would like to say about this book, but this has, I hope, been enough to convince you that here we have a vast saga which is of the highest interest both because its earliest stratum is Zoroastrian and because it is in itself a folk-tale of the very first order. Poor Ali has rendered us all a service about which he will probably never hear.

¹ Other publications on the subject include Zaehner's "Ahriman in Luristan", in *Sir J. J. Zartoshti Madressa Centenary Volume* (Bombay, 1967), pp. 26–36, and A. Mirdrekvandi Gunga Din, *No Heaven for Gunga Din: consisting of The British and American Officers' Book*. Edited and with an introduction by John Hemming. With a foreword by Professor R. C. Zaehner (Gollancz, London, 1965).

² In his "Postscript to *Zurvān*", *BSOAS* XVII, 1955, pp. 232–49, and esp. p. 237. A similar claim had been made by J. Duchesne-Guillemin in *Ohrmazd et Ahriman* (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1953), p. 128.

³ E.g. "Cosmogony and Cosmology (Zoroastrian)", to appear in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; "Mithra and Ahreman in Iranian Cosmogonies", paper read at the XVIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (Panel on Mithraic Studies), held in Rome in September 1990, to be published in the Proceedings of the Panel, edited by J. R. Hinnells. A more substantial publication on the subject is in preparation.

⁴ On this, see more fully my paper "Mithra and Ahreman, Binyāmīn and Malak Tāwūs: Traces of an Ancient Myth in the Cosmogonies of Two Modern Sects", read at the Second European Conference of Iranian Studies at Bamberg, October 1991.

⁵ "The Proto-Indoaryans", *JRAS* (1973), pp. 123–40.

⁶ *Art. cit.*

⁷ Instead of Mithra's "priestly" sacrifice of a bull, the more heroic

feat of slaying a monster or snake is attributed to Indra in the Veda. This act had the same effect, however, as Mit(h)ra's original sacrifice, viz. that of bringing about the "second stage" of the creation. See more fully the articles cited in n. 3 above.

⁸ See e.g. *Greater Bundahishn*, ed. B. T. Anklesaria, V.1; XXVII.1–2; XXXIV.27.

⁹ See e.g. M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* II (Brill, Leiden-Cologne, 1982), passim.

¹⁰ See e.g. M. Mokri, *Shah-Nama-ye Haqiqat: Le Livre des Rois de Vérité*, Bibliothèque Iranienne, (Tehran-Paris, 1966), esp. p. 16; W. Ivanow, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan* (Brill, Leiden, 1953), pp. 8, 43–4.

¹¹ See e.g. J. S. Guest, *The Yezidis* (KPI, London-New York, 1987), pp. 30, 200 f., 202 ff.

¹² Mirdrakvandi lost his parents; Irradiant goes in search of his; some of the characters were probably acquaintances of the author, etc.

¹³ E.g. the story of Ardashēr I and the daughter of the Arsacid Ardawān in the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān*; cf. that of Cambyses, the father of Cyrus the Great, and the daughter of the Median Astyages in Herodotus, which also implies that legitimate kingship passed from one dynasty to the other through marriage.

¹⁴ This pupil was Dr. Christopher Shackle, now Professor of Urdu at SOAS; but the work in question does not seem ever to have been fulfilled.